Tricks of the Trade

J. C. Squire

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And Other Poems

The Survival of the Fittest
And Other Poems

Imaginary Speeches

Steps to Parnassus

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

BY

J. C. SQUIRE

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To

ROBERT LYND

THESE FINAL ESSAYS IN A NOT WHOLLY

ADMIRABLE ART

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HOW THEY DO IT

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

No. 1. MR. H. BELLOC

I

At Martinmas, when I was born,
Hey diddle, Ho diddle, Do,
There came a cow with a crumpled horn,
Hey diddle, Ho diddle, Do.
She stood agape and said, " My dear,
You're a very fine child for this time of year,
And I think you'll have a taste in beer, "
Hey diddle, Ho diddle, Ho, do, do, do,
Hey diddle, Ho diddle, Do.

A taste in beer I've certainly got,
Hey diddle, Ho diddle, Do,
A very fine taste that the Jews have not,
Hey diddle, Ho diddle, Do.
And though I travel on the hills of Spain,
And Val-Pont-Côte and Belle Fontaine,
With lusty lungs I shall still maintain

Hey diddle, Ho diddle, Ho, do, do, do,
Hey diddle, Ho diddle, Do.

So Sussex men, wherever you be,
Hey diddle, Ho diddle, Do,
I pray you sing this song with me,
Hey diddle, Ho diddle, Do;
That of all the shires she is the queen,
And they sell at the " Chequers " at Chanctonbury Green
The very best beer that ever was seen.
Hey Dominus, Domine, Dominum, Domini, Domino, Domino.

II

Lord Globule was a backward lad,
Round leaden eyes Lord Globule had,
And shambling legs and shoulders stooped,
And lower lip that dripped and drooped.
At ten years old he could not get
The hang of half the alphabet;
At twelve he learnt to read his name,
At seventeen to write the same,
At twenty-one, his boyhood done,
He reached the age of twenty-one,
Which was sufficient reason why
His father's sturdy tenantry

Should gather in a large white tent,
Engulf some tons of nutriment,
And, freely primed with free potations,
Emit profuse congratulations.

Sweet twenty-one! O magic age!
The opulent youth surveys the stage
Where soon he'll walk 'mid loud applause.
He only hesitates because
His family all have different views
Which rôle, which entrance he should choose.
Lord Globule's father thought him made
To dominate the world of Trade;
" Finance, finance is more his line, "
Exclaimed his Uncle Rubinstein;
" Oh, no, " Aunt Araminta cried,
" Diplomacy should first be tried ";
But in the end with one accord
They thought the chances of a hoard
That British politics afford
Would suit Lord Globule's pocket best.

They all employed their interest
With Uncle Tom, and Moses Kant,
And Strauss, who married Globule's aunt,
And Johnny Burke, and Stoke and Shere,

And the old Duke and Humphrey Bere;
So that in January next year
A vacancy in Hertfordshire
Offered itself, and Globule's parts
Enraptured the electors' hearts.

The next five Sessions saw him slip
Through Private Secretaryship,
Under-Secretaryship,
Financial Secretaryship,
To Secretaryship of State,
With absolute power to regulate
The rural and the urban rate
Of birth among the pauper classes,
His duty 'twas to scan the masses
And carefully eliminate
What seemed to him degenerate,
To say what kinds they'd mutilate
And which ones merely isolate
In " homes from home " where they should be
Looked after tender-heartedly
By men selected by a Board
(No fewer than twenty to each ward).

A heavy task, as you'll agree,
For which they paid him liberally.

Globule the office still would grace,
And still would draw the emolument,
Had not a wretched accident
Unfortunately taken place.

His chief subordinate being away
(The man who wrote Lord Globule's speeches),
Lord Globule took a holiday,
Going by train to Burnham Beeches,
A secretary, tall and prim,
As usual, escorting him.
This tall young gentleman, when taxed
Later, denied he had relaxed
His customary watchfulness;
But be that as it may, 'tis certain
That late that night at Shoeburyness
Lord Globule was discovered bare
Of all except a muslin curtain
And some few feathers in his hair
And that the constable, when he
Was quite unable to explain
His actions or identity,
Concluded that he was insane.
Next day before the magistrate
The poor young pillar of the State

(His curtain bore no laundry marks!)
Was still quite unidentified,
And, catechized once more, replied
Only with sundry mews and barks.
And ultimately (to cut short
The day's proceedings in the court)
Two doctors and the police advised
That Globule should be sterilized
(A thing I need not further mention),
And sent to permanent detention.

For days the public did not hear
Of Globule's disappearance; near
And far, inquiries set on foot
Quite privately, produced no fruit,
Until at last the rumour spread
(Not in the papers) and some one said
That such a man in such a dress
Had been detained at Shoeburyness.
His relatives pursued the clue;
Alas, alas, the thing was true,
'Twas poor young Globule . . .
But the worst
Was this: that when they'd brought him out
They found the thing had got about

Among the unenlightened mob,
Which stultified beyond all doubt
The hopes they'd entertained at first
That Globule might preserve his job.
Fate was too strong; they had to bow;
Globule at home had been a failure;
And they could only give him now
The Governorship of South Australia.

No. 2. MR. W. H. DAVIES

I

I'm sure that you would never guess
  The tales I hear from birds and flowers,
Without them sure 'twould be a mess
  I'd make of all the summer hours;
But these fair things they make for me
A lovely life of joy and glee.

I saw some sheep upon some grass,
  The sheep were fat, the grass was green,
The sheep were white as clouds that pass,
  And greener grass was never seen;
I thought, "Oh, how my bliss is deep,
With such green grass and such fat sheep!"

And as I watch bees in a hive,
  Or gentle cows that rub 'gainst trees,
I do not envy men who live,
  No fields, no books upon their knees.
I'd rather lie beneath small stars
Than with rough men who drink in bars.

II

A poor old man
  Who has no bread,
He nothing can
  To get a bed.

He has a cough,
  Bad boots he has;
He takes them off
  Upon the grass.

He does not eat
  In cosy inns
But keeps his meat
  In salmon tins.

No oven hot,
  No frying-pan;
Thank God I'm not
  That poor old man.

No. 3. SIR HENRY NEWBOLT

It was eight bells in the forenoon and hammocks running
sleek
(*It's a fair sea flowing from the West*),
When the little Commodore came a-sailing up the
Creek
(*Heave Ho! I think you'll know the rest*).
Thunder in the halyards and horses leaping high,
Blake and Drake and Nelson are listenin' where they
lie,
Four and twenty blackbirds a-bakin' in a pie,
And the *Pegasus* came waltzing from the West.

Now the little Commodore sat steady on his keel
(*It's a fair sea flowing from the West*),
A heart as stout as concrete reinforced with steel
(*Heave Ho! I think you'll know the rest*).
Swinging are the scuppers, hark, the rudder snores,
Plugging at the Frenchmen, downing 'em by scores.
Porto Rico, Vera Cruz, and also the Azores,
And the *Pegasus* came waltzing from the West.

So three cheers more for the little Commodore
(*It's a fair sea flowing from the West*).
I tell you so again as I've told you so before
(*Heigh Ho! I think you know the rest*).
Aged is the Motherland, old but she is young
(Easy with the tackle there—don't release the bung),
And I sang a song like all the songs that I have ever sung
When the *Pegasus* came sailing from the West.

No. 4. MR. JOHN MASEFIELD

THE POET IN THE BACK STREETS

[Author's Note.—The following poem has been considerably compressed owing to the exigencies of space, which must sometimes be respected. But enough at least has been printed to indicate that it is a production of the School of Real Human Emotion that is leading a return to Life and Religion and Natural Action and away from the refined æstheticisms of so many of our modern poets.]

I

Down Lupus Street there is a little pub,
And there there worked a little bright-haired maiden,
Mornings the furniture she had to scrub,
Evenings she'd walk about with pewters laden;
But still she sang as did the birds in Eden:
In fact you would have said that there was no
More cheerful barmaid in all Pimlico.

She had eleven brothers and a sister,
A mother who had rheumatism bad,
And when she left o' mornings how they missed her,
And when she stayed o' Sundays weren't they glad;
No other help or maintenance they had,

So that their mother often said, " God pink 'em,
Lucky for them Flo makes a decent income.

" If 'twasn't for Flo's fifteen bob a week,
Me and them brats would not know where to turn,
For some of 'em ain't old enough to speak,
And none of 'em ain't old enough to earn,
And as for 'er bright merry japes, why, durn
My bleedin' eyes, if we'd no Flo to quirk us,
I'm sure we'd soon be droopin' in the workus.

" It's only Flo's 'igh spirits keeps me goin',
The way she sings ' My Pansy,' it's a treat,
And also ' All a-blowin' and a-growin', '
Our Flo is fair top-'ole, she can't be beat.
So give three cheers for Flo, it's time to eat;
Mary, you just run out and fetch some jam,
And Bill, take down the pickles and the ham."

So the years passed, so Florence earned the money,
And all the throng were happy as could be,
No air could blench or stain her cheeks so bonny,
No labour weigh upon her heart so free,
She was, in short, as chirpy as could be;
Until at last came Fate in Fate's own time,
And ravelled her in the dark nets of crime.

Crime is the foulest blot on our escutcheon,
Crime draws mankind as the moon draws the tides,
Crime is a thing I'm rather prone to touch on,
Crime is a clanking chain that grins and grides,
A lure, a snare, and other things besides;
If crime should cease, I should not then be able
To furnish Austin with my monthly fable.

One foggy night it happened there were drinking,
Within the bar a crowd of all the boys,
'Erb Gupps and Nixey Snell and Snouty Jinkin,
And Noakes with several friends from Theydon Bois
Visiting Pimlico; they made a noise
With call for booze and anecdote and curse,
And as the night wore on the row got worse.

"Wot sher," "Wot ho," "I don't fink," "Blast yer eyes,"
"That was a good 'un," "Cheese it," "'Arf a mo,"
"Ten pints of 'arf an' 'arf," "There ain't no flies
On Nixey," "You're a —— welsher, Joe,"
"A quartern more, miss," "—— lie," and so
They kept it up with rapid thrust and answer,
In phrases neatly measured for a stanza.

Even when they yelled and fought, Flo did not mind,
She did not mind, for she was used to this,
Even when to sottish amorousness inclined
They called her "Floss," or "Flo," instead of "Miss";
But when at last drunk Snouty snatched a kiss,
She felt her cheek flame with a flaming flame,
She felt her heart scorch with a hell of shame.

All the air howls when storms scourge the Atlantic,
All the wide forest shakes when falls the boar,
A wounded whale is often very frantic,
And jealous lions have been known to roar
Almost as loud as breakers on the shore;
But all these are tranquillity and rest
Compared with what went on in Florrie's breast.

Red in her soul shame set its blazing seal,
Black in her heart strong hate swirled round in torrents,
Blue in her eyes the lightning shone like steel,
White on her lips rage mingled with abhorrence;
Against a barrel's back leaned Barmaid Florence,
Watching with grinding teeth and eyeballs rolling,
Drunk Snouty who was belching forth "Tom Bowling."

There while the boozers rocked in song obscene,
She stood like a tall statue marble-still,
And first she moaned, "I am smirched, I am no more clean,"
And then she rasped, "By God, but I will kill
That lousy stinkard, yes, by God I will."
Fate flung the dice of Doom, her buckler buckled;
Life shrank, grew pale; Death rubbed his chin and chuckled.

So it draws on to closing-time; men go
By twos and threes; Flo washes pots and glasses,
Ranging them on the shelves in their degrees,
Wipes the wet counter dry, turns down the gasses;
And, locking up the doors, the portal passes,
Grasping with fervour of a frenzied bigot
Inside her muff a mallet and a spigot.

There Snouty was, fumbling his way along
Towards the bridge, blind-tight, alone and grunting,
And as he lurched he sang a maudlin song,
A foolish song beginning, "Baby Bunting,
For rabbit-skins your father's gone a-hunting,"
And as Flo heard the melody undroughty,
She whispered, "Cripes, *I'll* bunt you, Mr. Snouty!"

So they went on, he foremost, she behind,
Until they got to the Embankment wall;
He leant against it; swifter than the wind
She smashed her wedge into his head, and all
His brains spattered the stones in pieces small.
" My kiss," she hissed; then with a sudden shiver
Fled, tipping tools and Snouty in the river.

And like a fleet slim panther she did fly
Through the webbed streets of silent Pimlico,
Faithful the white stars glimmered in the sky,
Over the Lambeth bank the moon hung low,
A great round golden moon as white as snow.
Death cursed; Life smiled and murmured, " She will live,
The police will fail to track the fugitive."

And the high stars looked down and saw her enter
The doorway of her home in the dark street,
Happy to think the cops would never scent her,
Proud for the godlike swiftness of her feet.
Cheek to her pillow cried she: " Yes, 'twas sweet. "
But God behind God's curtain cogitated
About another end, and all things waited.

II

Six months rolled by; Flo earned her wonted wages,
The family consumed its usual food.
Had nothing changed I'd not have penned these pages;
But evil generally brings forth good;
Briefly I'd have it to be understood
One day a pavement-preacher's casual sentence
Hurled Flo into abysses of repentance.

So the sky fell; there came a hand of fire
That seared her soul with consciousness of sin,
Her soul was all one yearning of desire
For God; she felt like jumping from her skin;
Like hell in a through-draught she burnt within.
" Mother, " she said, " here is my this week's sub.,
I cannot go on working at the pub. "

The mother swooned; the children joined in prayer
That Flo should not decide in such a fast time;
But the fierce heavens cried beer was a snare
And skittles was a most immoral pastime;
So that that evening for the very last time
She washed the pots and locked the " Fountain " door,
As she had done so many nights before.

Next day she went out early without warning
Down the wan street; and later in the day,
That is to say well on into the morning,
She sent a District Messenger to say
That she had definitely gone away
To join the Battersea Salvation Army.
"Swipe me," her mother moaned, "the gal's gone barmy."

Barmy or not, she certainly had gone,
In her low attic poor old mother wept,
"She kep the home up, little Florence done,
We was so happy in the home she kep;
'Twas mean of her to hook it while we slep;
I'll larn her yet to take me by surprise,
I'll do her in, —— 'er —— eyes!"

But Flo was meanwhile getting fur and furder.
Safe in the barracks in the Bilsey Road,
Aching to make atonement for her murder,
She said she wished to take up her abode
There permanently; stabbed by her inner goad,
She very quickly rose to the direction
Of her new comrades' Social Effort Section.

She visited the mothers in the slums,
  And daily rescued suicidal wretches,
She helped the young with their addition sums,
  And washed the infants' clothes and mended breeches;
  And when she broke a plate or dropped some stitches,
None ever heard a hasty word from Flo,
The most she ever said was, " Here's a go! "

Work or no work, her heart was always merry,
  Heaven had washed her heart and cleansed her eyes,
Adjutant Flo, the Barmaid Missionary,
  Was the adored of every sex and size,
  They said that she had strayed from Paradise,
And every week her saintly reputation
Led many sinning souls to seek salvation.

Death laughed; Life winced; for in the neighbouring borough
  Old mother dwelt and bided her own hour,
Whetting a carving-knife with motions thorough,
  Practising stabs of accuracy and power.
  The scythe must fall, and then must fall the flower,
The day must die and then must sink the sun,
And all things end that ever have begun.

III

All the crowds crowd in Battersea's Green Park;
The deer are fed, the ducks quack on the water;
On the trim paths the Sabbath-resting clerk
Walks slowly with his wife and son and daughter,
Or seeks the grass where orators breathe slaughter,
Some singing hymns to variegate their turns,
Or waving flags with portraits of John Burns.

Middle the plot there brays a brazen band,
Peaked caps, red jerseys, other things of blue;
And when they cease behold a figure stand,
A bright-haired wench who wears those garments too.
She preaches truth as few but she can do
Concerning drink and cigarettes and betting
So that the mob must listen though they're sweating.

"S'welp me, it's hot." "Yes, s'welp me, so it is."
"Ain't it a shame the pubs ain't open Sundays,
Just as they be Tuesdays and Wednesdays, Liz,
Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays, and Mondays,
To close the —— up on just this one day's
'Bout the worst thing the —— law has done."
"Yus, so it is." "Gorblimey, wot a sun!"

But though the high sun spilled a raging heat,
They could not go, they had to stay and hear,
So tense her accents were, her voice so sweet.
"Crikey," says Bill, "she's a 'ard egg, no fear."
Says Sam, "By Gosh, I'll drop the——beer."
"You won't." "I will." "You won't." "What will you bet?"
"A . . . no, by gum, 'ere comes a Suffragette!"

It was a Suffragette with purple banner,
Handbell and bag of many-coloured bills,
At once in her inimitable manner
She draws the crowd; the space around her fills,
While Flo's grows empty; soon her pitch is still's
The solitudes of the Antarctic Ocean,
For even the band had shared the crowd's emotion.

Not a man trod her corner of the Park,
A quarter-mile around the place was void,
Only her voice to one lost mongrel's bark
Rang on, and still, as with sound texts she toyed,
She did not seem the slightest bit annoyed.
But Life shrank low, and greedy Death did dance,
For here at last had come old mother's chance!

Old mother had been hiding 'hind a tree,
  Old mother who had sworn the end of Flo,
Weapon in hand she stole up stealthily
  Towards the daughter who had grieved her so.
  " Aha! " she cried, " you little bitch, Ho, ho,
I'll pay you out now for your vile desertion . . . "
In Flo's plain blouse she made a neat insertion!

Flo fell, she fell, did Barmaid Flo, she fell;
  The carving-knife was sticking in her back,
And as she fell she cried out, " Well, well, well,
  What is the motive of this base attack? "
  But her old mother shrieked aloud, " Alack,
This was my child, this was my little child,
O, I must cover her with blossoms wild. "

So sought she underneath the elms and oaks,
  Garlic and dandelions, peonies
And cabbage-wort and sprole and old-man's-mokes,
  And lillikens and dinks and bitter-ease,
  And mortmains that the hind in autumn sees
In places where the mist lies on the hay
And all the land is frozen with the May.

And with her arms full, poor old mother staggered
To her poor child there dead upon the grass,
" My little Flo, " she whimpered, " I'll be jaggered
I don't know how it ever come to pass,
I don't know how I done it, little lass;
Whyever did I sharp that carvin' knife
And let out all my lovely darlin's life?

" She wor a merry grig, wor little Flo,
She kep the family goin' nicely, she did,
There never was a wheeze she didn't know,
She always pinched us anything we needed;
Cripes, but I cannot tell why I proceeded,
Just 'cos she left the family to starve,
My pretty Flo's sweet darlin' back to carve. "

And so she brought the flowers to her dead,
And piled them on her feet and face and breast,
Flo lay there still as down the blossoms shed,
A heavenly angel lying down to rest,
A downy bird at evening on its nest,
A cloud, a moth, a wave, a steamer, or
Almost any other metaphor.

" Good-bye, my little Flo, " said poor old mother
" You had your faults, I willingly admit,
Yet I am, taking one thing with another,
Sorry for my rash act more than a bit,
But still, I do not want to swing for it.
Mum is the word, least said is soonest mended. "
So mother left the Park, and all was ended.

No. 5. MR. G. K. CHESTERTON

When I leapt over Tower Bridge
  There were three that watched below,
A bald man and a hairy man,
  And a man like Ikey Mo.

When I leapt over London Bridge
  They quailed to see my tears,
As terrible as a shaken sword
  And many shining spears.

But when I leapt over Blackfriars
  The pigeons on St. Paul's
Grew ghastly white as they saw the sight
  Like an awful sun that falls;

And all along from Ludgate
  To the wonder of Charing Cross,
The devil flew through a host of hearts—
  A messenger of loss.

With a rumour of ghostly things that pass
  With a thunderous pennon of pain,
To a land where the sky is as red as the grass,
  And the sun as green as the rain.

No. 6. CANON H. D. RAWNSLEY

Britannia mourns for good grey heads that fall,
Survivors from our great Victoria's reign;
For they were men; take them for all in all
We shall not look upon their like again.

No. 7. NUMEROUS CELTS

There's a grey wind wails on the clover
  And grey hills, and mist around the hills,
And a far voice sighing a song that is over
  And my grey heart that a strange longing fills.

A sheen of dead swords that shake upon the wind,
  And a harp that sleeps though the wind is blowing
Over the hills and the seas and the great hills behind,
  The great hills of Kerry, where my heart would be
    going.

For I would be in Kerry now where quiet is the grass,
  And the birds are crying in the low light,
And over the stone hedges the shadows pass,
  And a fiddle weeps at the shadow of the night.

With Pat Doogan
Father Murphy
Brown maidens
King Cuchullain

The Kine
The Sheep
Some old women
Some old men
And Uncle White Sea-gull and all.

(*Chorus*) And Uncle White Sea-gull and all.

No. 8. THE PEOPLE WHO WRITE IN SECRET WHAT IN PUBLIC THEY ALLEGE TO BE FOLK-SONGS

The night it was so cold, and the moon it was so clear,
When I stood at the churchyard gate a-parting from my dear,
A-parting from my dear, for to bid my dear good-bye!
And I parted from my dear when the moon was in the sky.

"I never shall forget," said he, "wherever I may roam,
The day that I parted from my own true love at home,
My own true love at home that was always true to me,
I never shall forget my love wherever I may be.

"But I must off to Barbary for good King George to fight,
And it's farewell to Bayswater and to the Isle of Wight,
And it's farewell to my true love, it's farewell to you,
It's farewell to my own dear love, so faithful and so true."

He kissed me good-bye, and he gave me a ring,
And he rode away to Lunnon for to fight for the King;
Oh! lonely am I now, and sair, sair cold my pillow,
And I must bind my head with O the green willow.

For last night there came a white angel to my bed,
And he told to me that my own dear love was dead;
My own dear love is dead, and I am all alone
(So it's surely rather obtuse of you to ask me why I moan).

No. 9. MR. H. G. WELLS

I

I do not quite know how to begin. . . . Ever since I left England and settled here in this quiet Putumayo valley I have been wondering and wondering. . . . I want to put everything down quite frankly so that you who come after me shall understand. It is very peaceful here in the forest, and as my mind goes back to that roaring old England, with its strange welter of aspirations and basenesses, that little old England, so far away now, a small green jewel in the great sea, I break into a smile of tender tolerance. Here, as the immemorial procession of day and night, of summer and winter, sweeps over the earth, amid the vast serenities of primeval nature, it all seems so very far away, so small, so queerly inconsequent. . . . The men who made me, the men who broke me, the women I loved, the sprawling towns, the confused effort, and that ungainly lop-sided structure of our twentieth-century civilization, with its strange welter of sex. . . .

II

And then it was that the Hon. Astarte Cholmondeley came into my life. I remember as clearly as though it were yesterday—and it is now over thirty years ago—the moment of our meeting. It was at one of those enormous futile receptions that political hostesses give at the beginning of the Session, assemblies of two or three thousand men and women, minor politicians, organizers, journalists, all clamorous for champagne and burning for nods of recognition from the great men of the Party. It was a fine night, almost oppressively warm, and I had walked across the Park from Hill Street, carrying my opera-hat in my hand. There was a dull uniform roar from the distant traffic; the tops of the trees faintly swished in the light wind, the lights along the lake shone very quietly, and above were the vast serenities of the sky, powdered with stars. On benches in the shadows lurked pairs of quiet lovers, and the stars looked down upon them as they had upon lovers in Nineveh and Babylon. As I stepped out into the rush of Pall Mall, with its stream of swift motors, I thought, I remember, of my career. . . .

III

The crush was vulgar and intolerable.

I had spent an hour passing dejected remarks to the other young men, also there out of duty and as bored as I

was myself. Then suddenly she entered . . . a slender slip of a thing, brown-haired and brown-eyed, leaning flower-like on the arm of her elephantine mother, the Dowager. . . .

IV

"Dearest," she wrote me next day, "did you sleep last night? I did not sleep a wink. All night long I lay dazzled and overwhelmed by this wonderful thing that has come to us. And then this morning, when God's great dawn slowly lifted over the westward hills, I got up, did my hair (oh my beautiful, beautiful hair, now all yours, my own Man, all yours), and sat down to write this, my first letter, to you. I am sitting at the little window of my room in the Lion Tower. The breath of the roses rises in the fresh morning air; and out beyond the park, where the deer are placidly grazing, the slanting sun glints exquisitely on spacious woodland and rolling down, mile after mile. . . . Far away, against the blue of the horizon, there is a little pointing church spire, and somehow it reminds me of you. . . . Oh, my lover, I am going to lay bare to you the inmost shrine of my heart. You must be patient with me, very patient; for do we not belong to each other? We must live openly we two, we who are the apostles of new freedoms, of new realizations, of a second birth for this

dear, foolish old world of ours." Thus she wrote, and there was more, much more, too sacredly intimate to be set down here, but breathing in every line the essence of her adorable self. . . .

V

And then it was that Mary Browne came into my life. I had known her years ago when I was at college; I had thought her a meek and rather dull little girl, as insignificant as the rest of her family. But now there was about her a certain quality of graciousness, very difficult to define, but very unescapable when it is present, that gave to her mouse-grey hair and rather weak blue eyes a beauty very rare and very subtle. She had spent, she told me, two years in the East End at some social work or other. . . .

VI

And then I met Cecilia Scroop. . . .

VII

And so the end came. In those last days I worked more feverishly than ever, writing my book, attending committees, speaking on platforms throughout the country. I was the chief speaker during that by-election of Brooks's

at Manchester, which I still believe might have been the germ of a new social order, of coherences and approximations, of differentiations and realizations beyond the imagining of the men of our time, but to be very clearly and very palpably apprehended by that future race for whom we, in a blind and groping way, are living and building. . . . And then the blow fell. . . .

It was a Friday afternoon. The House had risen early after throwing out some absurd Bill that that ass Biffin had brought in; I think it was something about Bee Disease. I had been one of the tellers for the Noes, and at three o'clock I walked out into Palace Yard and along the chalky stone cloister that leads to the private tunnel through which members enter the Underground Railway station. I had promised to meet Astarte at four at the foot of the Scenic Railway (this was before the time when little Higgins revolutionized the amusement business with his actino-gyroscopes) in the Earl's Court Exhibition. Since her marriage with Binger communication had been increasingly difficult for us. All her letters were opened, and Binger had eavesdroppers at work in the telephone exchanges. Her chauffeur, happily, played his master false, and she was usually able to keep appointments when she had made them; and for some months we had arranged our meetings by little cryptic notices in the agony column of the *Morning Post.* We had thought our-

selves safe. But she must have dropped a casual word to somebody; some fool had given us away; and when I got to Earl's Court I found that Astarte was there, but that Mary and Cecilia were there as well. . . .

VIII

I remonstrated with them. I knew it was hopeless, and my heart sank; but I did my best. Greatest agony of all it was to know that these women in whom I had trusted, whom I had looked to as pioneers, as auguries of what was to be and what still will be, were, when the crisis came, still shackled and bound by the little petty jealousies of the old system. With set, white faces they glowered upon me (it was raining a little I remember, and the ground at our feet was muddy and covered with stained and trampled paper) as I spoke, softly and passionately, of muddle and waste, of the sordid and furtive shames and reticences that man has brought with him from the ancestral past, that he must shed before we build for our gods the diviner temples that might be. . . . Night came over . . . and then, as my voice failed, a tall man stepped out from behind a hoarding. It was Montacute, the Prime Minister. "I am very sorry for you," he said simply, "but I am afraid, Mr. Bilgewater, we shall have to ask you to resign." He seemed to hesitate a moment; then, as though half ashamed, he held

out his hand and looked me in the eyes. . . . I had known him since I was a boy at school and he a young man, a fastidious and kindly young man who had seemed almost too delicate for the rough work of politics. He had always taken a friendly interest in me even when I was bitterly fighting him. . . . "Good-bye," he said. My voice was husky as I returned his farewell.

IX

I went back to my chambers and told my man to pack a single portmanteau. There were just three hours before the boat-train. Before I left I wrote ten letters. . . .

No. 10. MR. G. BERNARD SHAW

Fragment from an Unwritten Play

MAHOMET THE PROPHET

Act II

The library of the Prophet's house at Medina. As the audience is looking straight into a corner, only two walls are seen. The right wall contains two high windows, through which much blue sky is visible; between them MAHOMET *is seated, with his back to the audience, at a handsome oak writing-desk. At the far end of the left wall is a door, and along the rest of its length runs a long blue divan, piled with multicoloured cushions, on which recline* AYESHA, *a slender girl with deep black eyes, pale cheeks and golden hair, and two others of the Prophet's eighty wives. They are drinking coffee from brass bowls and turning over the pages of illustrated magazines. The floor is strewn with rich rugs.*

After five minutes' silence the Prophet stretches his arms, rises, and turns round. He is a fleshy man with huge head, hands, and feet. His eyes are red, his nose imperious, and

his beard covers half his chest. He walks up and down nervously jerking his hands, then stands still, right centre.

MAHOMET: Well, well, my poor dead Khadija!

THE WIVES: We think you might have the decency to refrain from mentioning our predecessor in front of us.

MAHOMET: Don't be absurd, my dears. You, Ayesha, ought to have had more sense. You ought to know that my feelings are perfectly natural. Here has the army just been cutting up the big summer caravan to Mecca, chock-full of all the latest things from Constantinople. I have become the biggest property-owner in Arabia; and you refuse to let me lament the death of Khadija, who used to run the grocery-shop with me. Your behaviour is monstrous. I shall present you all at Christmas with complete editions of August Strindberg.

AYESHA (*screaming*): No, no, anything rather than that!

MAHOMET: Well, mend your manners then. It is simply intolerable that I should drudge like a slave working up this prophet business for a pack of ungrateful women, and then get treated like this. (*Enter* ABU, *a white-bearded servant, with a card on a tray.*) Schopenhauer was right . . . or was it Weininger?

ABU (*advancing*): Weininger, sir. I am sure that is

correct, sir. I know his book very well. I used to read it to my poor wife, sir, when she was in her last illness. (*Wipes his eyes.*) It was a great solace to her.

MAHOMET (*taking the card and looking at it*): I thought I had told you I was not at home. I am supposed to be at the front.

ABU (*turning to go*): Very well, sir.

MAHOMET: Here, come back. Is there any news from Mecca?

ABU (*rubbing his head*): Oh, yes, sir! I quite forgot, sir. The excitement of the moment, I suppose, sir. Mecca was taken last Sunday, sir. It was dark, sir, and your men ran into the town by mistake. The other side had run out of it by mistake. Yes, it must have been an exceedingly dark night, sir.

MAHOMET: Any converts?

ABU: Well, sir, it is like this, sir; there were not many left when your honour's men had finished. A few children, perhaps. But the general who was impersonating your honour had a great reception from the troops. (*Goes out.*)

MAHOMET (*to* AYESHA): Abu is really getting ridiculous. We cannot possibly keep the old fool any longer; he may give me away at any time if he goes on like this. Why the devil can't you put an advertisement for a servant in the paper as I asked you to?

AYESHA (*sulkily*): Where would you be if I left off writing your wretched old Koran for you?

MAHOMET: Precisely where I am, my dear. You are not indispensable. Anybody else could easily continue my Koran. In fact I think it would actually be a good thing to make a change. All those disgusting things you've put in about women, and so on. They really revolt me with their tactlessness.

(*There is a great noise at the door, which suddenly gives way and lets in a tall, restless, thin man with a high forehead and a forked red-grey beard. He is dressed in a fawn-coloured all-wool coat and knickerbockers and wears a red tie. He nods his head sideways with a gay smile, rubs his hands and takes up his stand with his back to the corner.* MAHOMET *and the woman all stare at him in amazement, for they have never seen a dramatist before.*)

THE DRAMATIST: Come along, Prophet, brighten up. You must certainly know my name. I think this inhospitality is perfectly disgraceful. (MAHOMET *makes a threatening move towards him.*) No, no, don't bother about ringing for coffee for me. I don't drink your barbarous poisons. Don't you think you might introduce me to the ladies, Mahomet?

MAHOMET (*to the women*): Go to your rooms at once. I cannot possibly let you listen to the conversation of this pernicious Englishman.

(AYESHA *and the others, with evident reluctance, get up and file through the door, the last shutting it behind her.*)

Well, sir, to what do I owe this most unwarrantable intrusion?

T. D.: Now, now, my friend, you can't come it over me like that. I shall blacken your character thoroughly if you are not careful. The truth is, that I came here for the simple reason that though I have frequently put my own name into my characters' mouths, I have never hitherto actually introduced myself as a person in one of my plays. After all, when you come to think of it, my habit of expressing my sentiments through invented characters has been utterly fantastic. And, besides, some of these confounded actors have made hay with the parts by trying to turn them into other people. One of these days I shall have to start a school for actors. No actor ought to be under eighty years of age. Men younger than that always will insist on interposing their own personalities between the author and his public. What I want is some one who will speak my lines. What on earth do people think my plays are for? I wasn't born in order that a lot

of stupid mummers should have an opportunity of parading their temperaments in public. At all events, here I am, you old reprobate (*takes out his watch and looks at it*), and I propose to talk to you for your good——

MAHOMET (*groaning and sinking on divan*): But what do you want to write a play about me for? I have never done you any harm. I am only a poor prophet, earning an honest living. My Arabians are a simple, unsophisticated people, and they have never seen a play in their life, except my butler, who is merely a menial and doesn't count.

T. D.: Now, really, my dear Prophet, this is the basest ingratitude. Why, in most of my plays the characters have had to tolerate a simple honest Englishman introduced into their midst. I can assure you that if I had sent you one of those instead of very kindly coming myself, you would have found him much duller company than you are finding me. Upon my oath, I think you ought to pay me for letting you off so lightly.

MAHOMET (*blubbering*): But why do you want to drag me into it at all? Especially as my dislike of art is notorious.

T. D. (*elevating his eyebrows*): Well, my friend, if you insist, I will tell you; but your blood be upon your own head. You have about you several characteristics that make it inevitable that sooner or later I should nobble you. In the

first place you are exceedingly well known; in the second place you are a humbug and an impostor; in the third place you are a shameless polygamist; and, in the fourth place, if you refer to any decent encyclopædia, you will find that you are probably an epileptic, like Cæsar and Napoleon. I ask, have you the atrocious conceit to think that you have a right to escape what Cæsar and Napoleon have had to submit to? Why, my dear sir, the thing is perfectly preposterous. I wonder you aren't ashamed of yourself. I shall really have to write to the *Times* about you.

MAHOMET: Wallah, Billah, Allah, Bismillah! (*He falls to the ground, foaming at the mouth.* THE DRAMATIST *rings bell in the wall.* ABU *enters.*)

T. D.: My friend, your master seems a little indisposed.

ABU: Yes, sir. So it appears, sir. Very sad, sir. Unavoidable tragedy of our time. Clash of ideas, sir, and so on. . . . (*Picks up the* PROPHET *and props him against divan.* THE DRAMATIST *goes out.*)

MAHOMET (*recovering his senses*): My God, Abu, where am I? . . . I've had a good many visions and revelations, but never one quite so bad as this!

CURTAIN

HOW THEY WOULD HAVE DONE IT

No. 1. IF WORDSWORTH HAD WRITTEN "THE EVERLASTING MERCY"

Ever since boyhood it has been my joy
To rove the hills and vales, the woods and streams,
To commune with the flowers, the beasts, the birds,
And all the humble messengers of God.
And so not seldom have my footsteps strayed
To that bare farm where Thomas Haythornthwaite
(Alas! 'tis now ten years the good old man
Is dead!) wrung turnips from the barren soil,
To keep himself and his good wife, Maria,
Whom I remember well, although 'tis now
Full twenty years since she deceased; and I
Have often visited her quiet grave
In summer and in winter, that I might
Place some few flowers upon it, and returned
In solemn meditation from the spot.
In the employment of this honest man
There was a hind, Saul Kane, I knew him well,
And oft-times 'twas my fortune to lament
The blackness of the youth's depravity.

For when I came to visit Haythornthwaite
The good old man, leaning upon this spade,
Would say to me, " Saul Kane is wicked, sir;
A wicked lad. Before he cut his teeth
He broke his poor old mother's heart in two.
For at the beer-house he is often seen
With ill companions, and at dead of night
We hear him loud blaspheming at the owls
That fly about the house. I oft have blushed
At deeds of his I could not speak about."
But yet so wondrous is the heart of man
That even Saul Kane repented of his sins—
A little maid, a little Quaker maid,
Converted him one day. " Saul Kane," she said,
" Dear Saul, I pray you will get drunk no more."
Nor did he; but embraced a sober life,
And married Mary Thorpe; and yesterday
I met him on my walk, and with him went
Up to the house where he and his do dwell.
And there I long in serious converse stayed,
Speaking of Nature and of politics,
And then turned homeward meditating much
About the single transferable vote.

No. 2. IF SWINBURNE HAD WRITTEN "THE LAY OF HORATIUS"

N.B.—Read this aloud, with resonance, nor examine too closely the meaning

May the sword burn bright, may the old sword smite, that
a myriad years have worn and rusted?
May an old wind blow where the young winds go
immaculate over the eager land?
May faded blossoms on ripening bosoms flame with lust
as of old they lusted,
Or the might of a night take flight with the white sweet
arms of a dead Dionysian band?
Ah, nay! for the rods of the high pale gods the power of the
past have spilled and broken
And over the fields the amaranth yields her guerdon of
gossamer, bitter as rue,
And the desolate blind sad ghost of the wind falters and
fails as a word that was spoken
Long since of a fire and a blazing pyre of perjured mon-
archs and kings untrue.[1]

[1] Possible mention of Tarquin.

The sword may smite and the keen sword bite though the
clouds in the sky be clouds of peril,
Though the Teuton glance at the flanks of France and the
hand of Fate be a hand unseen,
For the brave man's[1] arm was swift to charm and the
coward's arm was weak and sterile
Or ever the Saxon galleons swam to England[2] over the
waters green
And over the high Thessalian hills the feet of the maidens
fail and falter,
Samian waters and Lemnian valleys, Ithacan rivers and
Lesbian seas,
And the god returning with frenzy burning foams at the
foot of a roseless altar,
And dumb with the kiss of Artemis and the berries of
death the virgin flees.

With persistence and luck the reader, after eighty verses or so, would have come to something as specific as this:

For the triumph of the trampling of the nations
And the laughter of the loud Etrurian[3] gates
And the thunder of a host of desolations
And the lightning of an avalanche of hates

[1] Conceivably Horatius.
[2] Our mother, inviolate ever since, save for one only occasion.
[3] Lars Porsena in poet's mind.

Never daunted thee or made thy cheek the paler
On the bridge which thou didst hold as held the fleet
Drake, our own superb Elizabethan sailor,
Yea, and drove the bloody tyrant from his seat.

No. 3. IF MR. MASEFIELD HAD WRITTEN "CASABIANCA"

"You dirty hog," "You snouty snipe,"
"You lump of muck," "You bag of tripe,"
Such, as their latest breaths they drew,
The objurgations of the crew.
—— —— —— they roared
As they went tumbling overboard,
Or frizzled like so many suppers
All along the halyard scuppers.
"You—— " . . . the last was gone,
And Cassy yelled there all alone.
(He thought the old man was on the ship.)
"Father! this gives me the fair pip!"

"My God, you old vagabone," he cried,
"If only I . . ." No voice replied;
Only the tall flames higher sprang,
Amid the spars, and soared and sang,
Only along the rigging came
God's great unfolding flower of flame,

And Love's divine dim planet shed
Her radiance on the many dead;
And past the battling fleets the sea
Stretched to the world's edge tranquilly,
Breathing with slow, contented breath
As though it were in love with Death,
As it has breathed since first began
Man's inhumanity to man,
As it will do when like a scroll
All the heavens together roll.
There's that purple passage done
And I have one less lap to run.

Dogs barked, owls hooted, cockerels crew,
As in my works they often do
When, flagging with my main design,
I pad with a descriptive line.
Young Cassy cried again: " Oh, damn!
What an unhappy put I am!
Will nobody go out and search
For dad, who's left me in the lurch?
For dad, who's left me on the poop,
For dad, who's left me in the soup,
For dad, who's left me on the deck.
Perhaps it's what I should expeck
Considerin' 'ow he treated me
Before I came away to sea.

" Often at home he used to beat
My head for talking in the street,
Often for things I didden do,
He brushed my breeches with a shoe.
O! but I wish that I was home now,
Treading the soft old Breton loam now
In that old Breton country where
Mellows the golden autumn air,
And all the tender champaign fills
With hyacinths and daffodils,
And on God's azure uplands now
They plough the ploughed fields with a plough,
And earth-worms feel averse from laughter,
With hungry white birds following after.
And maids at evening walk with men
Through the meadows and up the glen
To hear the old sweet tale again."

The deck was getting hot and hotter,
" Father! " he screamed, " you —— rotter! "
The deck was getting red and redder,
And now he thought he'd take a header,
Now he advanced and now he funked it . . .
It had been better had he bunked it,
For as he wavered thus, and swore,
There came a slow tremendous roar.

Lord Nelson suddenly woke up.
" Where is Old Cassy and his pup?
' Don't know,' you say? Why, strike me blind,
I s'pose I'd better ask the wind."
He asked the wind; the brooding sky
At once gave back the wind's reply:
" Wotto, Nelson! "
" Wotto, sonny? "
" Do you think you're being funny?
Can't you look around, confound you,
At all these fragments that surround you,
Thick as thieves upon the sea,
Instead of coming bothering me? "

Or, alternatively, if you prefer his other method, it would run like this:

And the flames rose, and leaping flames of fire
Leapt round the masts and made the spars a crown,
A golden crown, as ravenous as desire.
" Father! " he cried, " my feet are getting brown."
" Father! " he cried. The quiet stars looked down,
The flames rose up like flowers overhead.
He was alone and all the crew were dead.

No. 4. IF ALMOST ANY ELIZABETHAN HAD WRITTEN "SHE DWELT AMONG THE UNTRODDEN WAYS"

Ask me not for the semblance of my loue.
Amidst the fountains of the christal Doue
Like to that fayre Aurora did she runne,
Who treads the beams of the sweete morning sunne.
Forth from her head her hayres like golden wyre
Did spring; her amorous eyes were lamps of fire,
Bright as that torch their heauenly raies did mount
Wherewith fayre Hero lit the Hellespont,
Or as that flame which on the desert lies
When new-borne Phenix soareth to the skies.
Like wanton darts her eye-beames she did throw
From out her noble forehead's iuorie bow
Whose Beauties great perfection would withstand
The skill of the most cunning painter's hand.
Her virgin nose like Dians self did raigne
Amidst her vermell cheekes' ambrosiall plaine;
Her busie lips twinne Rubies did appeare
From which her Voyce did come as Diamonds cleare;

Venus' owne sonne would sigh to look beneath
At the straight pearlie pleasaunce of her teethe.
Like to fayre starres, or rather, like the sunne
Was her smooth Marble chinne's pavilion,
Wherefrom her slender necke the eye did lead
To shoulders like twinne Lilies on a mead,
Whiter than Ledaes fethers or white milke,
As sweete as nectar and as softe as silke.
O, and her tender brests, they were as white
As snowie hills which Phebus' beames doe smite
Engirt with azure and with Saphire veines. . . .

(*Cetera desunt*)

No. 5. IF POPE HAD WRITTEN "BREAK, BREAK, BREAK"

Fly, Muse, thy wonted themes, nor longer seek
The consolations of a powder'd cheek;
Forsake the busy purlieus of the Court
For calmer meads where finny tribes resort.
So may th' Almighty's natural antidote
Abate the worldly tenour of thy note,
The various beauties of the liquid main
Refine thy reed and elevate thy strain.

See how the labour of the urgent oar
Propels the barks and draws them to the shore.
Hark! from the margin of the azure bay
The joyful cries of infants at their play.
(The offspring of a piscatorial swain,
His home the sands, his pasturage the main.)
Yet none of these may soothe the mourning heart,
Nor fond alleviation's sweets impart;
Nor may the pow'rs of infants that rejoice
Restore the accents of a former voice,

Nor the bright smiles of ocean's nymphs command
The pleasing contact of a vanished hand.
So let me still in meditation move,
Muse in the vale and ponder in the grove,
And scan the skies where sinking Phœbus glows
With hues more rubicund than Cibber's nose. . . .

(*After which the poet gets into his proper stride*)

No. 6. IF GRAY HAD HAD TO WRITE HIS ELEGY IN THE CEMETERY OF SPOON RIVER INSTEAD OF IN THAT OF STOKE POGES

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
  The whippoorwill salutes the rising moon,
And wanly glimmer in her gentle ray,
  The sinuous windings of the turbid Spoon.

Here where the flattering and mendacious swarm
  Of lying epitaphs their secrets keep,
At last incapable of further harm
  The lewd forefathers of the village sleep.

The earliest drug of half-awakened morn,
  Cocaine or hashish, strychnine, poppy-seeds
Or fiery produce of fermented corn
  No more shall start them on the day's misdeeds.

For them no more the whetstone's cheerful noise,
  No more the sun upon his daily course

Shall watch them savouring the genial joys,
Of murder, bigamy, arson and divorce.

Here they all lie; and, as the hour is late,
O stranger, o'er their tombstones cease to stoop,
But bow thine ear to me and contemplate
The unexpurgated annals of the group.

There are two hundred only: yet of these
Some thirty died of drowning in the river,
Sixteen went mad, ten others had D. T's.
And twenty-eight cirrhosis of the liver.

Several by absent-minded friends were shot,
Still more blew out their own exhausted brains,
One died of a mysterious inward rot,
Three fell off roofs, and five were hit by trains.

One was harpooned, one gored by a bull-moose,
Four on the Fourth fell victims to lock-jaw,
Ten in electric chair or hempen noose
Suffered the last exaction of the law.

Stranger, you quail, and seem inclined to run;
But, timid stranger, do not be unnerved;
I can assure you that there was not one
Who got a tithe of what he had deserved.

Full many a vice is born to thrive unseen,
Full many a crime the world does not discuss,
Full many a pervert lives to reach a green
Replete old age, and so it was with us.

Here lies a parson who would often make
Clandestine rendezvous with Claflin's Moll,
And 'neath the druggist's counter creep to take
A sip of surreptitious alcohol.

And here a doctor, who had seven wives,
And, fearing this *ménage* might seem grotesque,
Persuaded six of them to spend their lives
Locked in a drawer of his private desk.

And others here there sleep who, given scope,
Had writ their names large on the Scrolls of Crime,
Men who, with half a chance, might haply cope,
With the first miscreants of recorded time.

Doubtless in this neglected spot is laid
Some village Nero who has missed his due,
Some Bluebeard who dissected many a maid,
And all for naught, since no one ever knew.

Some poor bucolic Borgia here may rest
Whose poisons sent whole families to their doom,

Some hayseed Herod who, within his breast,
Concealed the sites of many an infant's tomb.

Types that the Muse of Masefield might have stirred,
Or waked to ecstasy Gaboriau,
Each in his narrow cell at last interred,
All, all are sleeping peacefully below.

. . . . . .

Enough, enough! But, stranger, ere we part.
Glancing farewell to each nefarious bier,
This warning I would beg you take to heart,
"There is an end to even the worst career."

No. 7. IF A VERY NEW POET HAD WRITTEN "THE LOTUS-EATERS"

I

Ah!
Ough!
Umph!
It *was* a sweat!
Thank God, that's over!
No more navigating for me
I am on to
Something
Softer. . . .
Conductor
Give us a tune!

II

Work!
Did I used to work?
I seem to remember it

Out there.
Millions of fools are still at
It,
Jumping about
All over the place. . . .
And what's the good of it all? . . .
Buzz,
Hustle,
Pop,
And then . . .
Dump
In the grave.

III

Bring me six cushions
A yellow one, a green one, a purple one, an orange one,
an ultramarine one, and a vermilion one,
Colours of which the combination
Pleases my eye.
Bring me
Also
Six lemon squashes
And
A straw. . . . .

IV

I have taken off my coat.
I shall now
Loosen
My braces.

V

Now I am
All right . . .
My God. . . .
I do feel lazy!

No. 8. IF HENRY JAMES HAD WRITTEN THE CHURCH CATECHISM

Q. What is your name?

A. It may possibly be conceived as standing in a relation of contiguity to a certain—shall we say?—somewhat complicatedly rectilinear design—to put it colloquially, a symbol—employed by such of the races of mankind as follow the Roman usage to denote a sort of suppressed explosion, or rather, a confused hum "produced" when the upper and the nether lip are brought with some firmness—or even, as one might phrase it, "snap"—together, and a continuous sound is compelled for egress to flow through a less harmonious though undeniably more prominent organ. Or, on the other hand, its relation to that so interesting figure may be something even closer than one of mere contiguity, however proximate, something in the nature of coincidence, of body and soul identity even: in a word, it may be, or, more exactly, may be represented by, that symbol itself.

Q. Who gave you that name?

A. Which?

Q. Oh no, *not* the other one, the quite inevitably discursive family "label."

A. You mean my . . .

Q. Well yes, not that all so shared, and as it were almost—if one may forgivably say it—may one?—"vulgarized"—your, as they call it, "surname."

A. Oh, *not* that one?

Q. No . . .

A. The other?

Q. Yes—that other—that more exquisitely personal, the more (dare one?) *appropriated,* the one of which, I had thought, we touched, even grasped, the skirts when our interlocution, or to put it quite brutally, when we began our conversation.

A. You refer . . .

Q. I am, dear lady, all ears.

A. To, in fact, my—since we are both to be so frank—Christian name?

Q. Oh, but you are great!

A. Not *great,* not, I mean, really, in the sense that you mean. . . .

Q. I mean?

A. The other sense, you know.

Q. Yes, I apprehend you, but it wasn't that one I meant.

A. Then what in the world was it?

Q. Take it from another point of view, wasn't frankness to be, always, our splendid object?

A. Explicitly.

Q. Wasn't it?

A. Oh no, I wouldn't doubt it; I wouldn't, really wouldn't, let you down.

Q. Not even gently?

A. The other way, I meant.

Q. Divine clarity! And who gave it you?

A. The Deluge!

Q. He was it, or she?

A. Oh, never he, as he would himself say, never on your life.

Q. And she?

A. She would, as she always will, bet her boots not!

Q. Not, surely it wasn't, they?

A. They!

Q. They!

A. Oh, certainly they! Who could have stopped them. Not miserable I, so pitifully, so hopelessly, so microscopically, futilely small! They were all there, and there was I. And they did it, oh, quite finally did it.

Q. Who?

Etc.

No. 9. IF LORD BYRON HAD WRITTEN "THE PASSING OF ARTHUR"

So all day long the noise of battle rolled
  Among the mountains by the western sea,
Till, when the bell for evening service tolled,
  Each side had swiped the other utterly;
And, looking round, Sir Bedivere the bold
  Said, " Sire, there's no one left but you and me;
I'm game to lay a million to a fiver
That, save for us, there is not one survivor."

" Quite likely," answered Arthur, " and I'm sure
  That I have been so hammered by these swine
To-morrow's sun will find us yet one fewer.
  I prithee take me to yon lonely shrine
Where I may rest and die. There is no cure
  For men with sixty-seven wounds like mine."
So Bedivere did very firmly grapple
His arm, and led him to the Baptist Chapel.

There he lay down, and by him burned like flame
His sword Excalibur: its massy hilt
Crusted with blazing gems that never came
From mortal mines; its blade, inlaid and gilt
And graved with many a necromantic name,
Still dabbled with the blood the king had spilt.
Which touching, Arthur said, " Sir Bedivere,
Please take this brand and throw him in the mere. "

Bold Bedivere sprang back like one distraught,
Or like a snail when tapped upon the shell,
Was *this* the peerless prince for whom he'd fought,
A man who'd drop his cheque-book down a well?
Surely he must have dreamt the words, he thought.
Had the king spoken? Was it possible
To give so lunatic a proposal credit? . . .
And yet the king undoubtedly had said it.

He said it again in accents full serene:
" Go to the lake and throw this weapon in it,
And then come back and tell me what you've seen.
The business should not take you half a minute.
Off now. I say precisely what I mean."
" Right, sire! " But, *sotto voce,* " What a sin it
Would be, what criminal improvidence
To waste an *arme blanche* of such excellence! "

But Arthur's voice broke through his meditation,
" Why this delay? I thought I said 'at once'? "
" Yes, sire, " said he, and, with a salutation
Walked off reflecting, " How this fighting blunts
One's wits. In any other situation
I should have guessed—'twere obvious to a dunce
That this all comes from Merlin's precious offices,
Why could he not confine himself to prophecies? "

Bearing the brand, across the rocks he went
And now and then a hot impatient word
Witnessed the stress of inner argument.
" Curse it, " he mused, " a really sumptuous sword
Is just the very one accoutrement
I never have been able to afford;
This beautiful, this incomparable Excalibur
Would nicely suit a warrior of my calibre.

" Could anything be madder than to hurl in
This stupid lake a sword as good as new,
Merely because that hoary humbug Merlin
Suggested that would be the thing to do?
A bigger liar never came from Berlin,
I *won't* be baulked by guff and bugaboo;
The old impostor's lake may call in vain for it
I'll stick it in a hole and come again for it. "

So, having safely stowed away the sword
And marked the place with several large stones
Sir Bedivere returned to his liege lord
And, with a studious frankness in his tones,
Stated that he had dropped it overboard;
But Arthur only greeted him with groans:
" My Bedivere, " he said, " I may be dying,
But even dead I'd spot such barefaced lying.

" It's rather rough upon a dying man
That his last dying orders should be flouted.
Time was when if you'd thus deranged my plan
I should have said, ' Regard yourself as outed,
I'll find some other gentleman who can. '
Now I must take what comes, that's all about it. . . .
My strength is failing fast, it's very cold here.
Come, pull yourself together, be a soldier.

" Once more I must insist you are to lift
Excalibur and hurl him in the mere.
Don't hang about now. You had better shift
For all you're worth, or when you come back here
The chances are you'll find your master stiffed. "
Whereat the agonized Sir Bedivere,
His " Yes, Sire, " broken by a noisy sob,
Went off once more on his distasteful job.

But as he walked the inner voice did say:
" I quite agree with ' Render unto Cæsar,'
But nothing's said of throwing things away
When a man's king's an old delirious geezer,
You don't meet swords like this one every day.
Jewels and filigree as fine as these are
Should surely be preserved in a museum
That our posterity may come and see 'em.

" A work of Art's a thing one holds in trust,
One has no right to throw it in a lake,
Such Vandalism would arouse disgust
In every Englishman who claims to take
An interest in Art. Oh no, I must
Delude my monarch for my country's sake;
Obedience in such a case, in fact,
Were patently an anti-social act.

" It is not pleasant to deceive my king,
I had much rather humour his caprice,
But, if I tell him I have thrown the thing,
And, thinking that the truth, he dies in peace,
Surely the poets of our race will sing
(Unless they are the most pedantic geese)
The praises of the knight who lied to save
This precious weapon from a watery grave. "

He reached the margin of the lake and there
  Until a decent interval had passed
Lingered, the sword once more safe in its lair.
  Then to his anxious monarch hurried fast,
And, putting on a still more candid air,
  Assured the king the brand had gone at last.
But Arthur, not deceived by any means,
Icily said: " Tell that to the marines.

" Sir Bedivere, this conduct won't enhance
  Your reputation as a man of honour.
If you had dared to lead me such a dance
  A week ago, you would have been a goner,
Listen to me! I give you one more chance;
  And, if you fail again, I swear upon our
Old oath of fealty to the Table Round
I shall jump up and fell you to the ground."

So that sad soul went off alone once more.
  Rebellion frowned no longer on his face;
His spirit was broken; when he reached the shore
  He wormed the sword out of its hiding-place,
Excalibur, that man's eye should see no more,
  And, fearing still a further lapse from grace,
Shut his eyes tight against that matchless jewel
And, desperately hissing, " This is cruel, "

Swung it far back; and then, with mighty sweep,
Hove it to southward as he had been bade.
And, as it fell, an arm did suddenly leap
Out of the moonlit wave, in samite clad,
And grasped the sword and drew it to the deep.
And all was still; and Bedivere, who had
No nerve at all left now, exclaimed, " My Hat!
I'll never want another job like that! "

Thus Bedivere at last performed his vow.
And Arthur, when the warrior bore in sight,
Read his success upon his gloomy brow.
" Done it at last, " he murmured, " *that's* all right.
Well, Bedivere, and what has happened now? "
Demanded he; and the disconsolate knight
In a harsh bitter voice replied, " Oh, damn it all,
I saw a mystic arm, clothed in white samite all. "

" Quite right, " said Arthur, " better late than never;
Now, if you please, you'll take me for a ride,
Put me upon your back and then endeavour
To run top-speed unto the waterside.
Come, stir your stumps, you must be pretty clever,
Or otherwise I fear I shall have died
Before you've landed me upon the jetty,
And then the programme's spoilt: which were a pity. "

What followed after this (although my trade is
Romantic verse) is quite beyond my lay.
For automobile barges, full of ladies
Singing and weeping, never came my way.
Though, for that matter, I was once in Cadiz—
But never mind. It will suffice to say
That in his final act our old friend Malory
Was obviously playing to the gallery.

No. 10. IF SIR RABINDRANATH TAGORE HAD WRITTEN "LITTLE DROPS OF WATER"

Child, I am wondering.
Last night I was watching the silver moon rising over the sea,
And in her light the colour of the sea was pale, and the colour of the grasses was dark and sweet as the champak.
I heard the ducks crying over the waters by the shore.
I heard from the khitmatgar, threading like pearls on the darkness, the soft notes of the cummerbund.
Child, I am wondering.

Child, I smelt the flowers,
The golden flowers . . . hiding in crowds like fairies at my feet,
And as I smelt them the endless smile of the infinite broke over me, and I knew that they and you and I were one.

They and you and I, the cowherds and the cows, the jewels and the potter's wheel, the mothers and the light in baby's eyes.

For the sempstress when she takes one stitch may make nine unnecessary;

And the smooth and shining stone that rolls and rolls like the great river may gain no moss,

And it is extraordinary what a lot you can do with a platitude when you dress it up in Blank Prose.

Child, I smelt the flowers.

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